

information about the time required to deliver goods from the master warehouse 5 to the branch warehouses 6 and the time required to deliver goods between the branch warehouses 6, etc. The warehouse-specific inventory information includes the proper inventories of individual warehouses, etc.

Based on this information, the main server 81 can control inventory transfers from the master warehouse 5 to the branch warehouses 6 and division of delivery operations among the branch warehouses 6. Besides, if toner cartridges ordered by the user 4 are not available in nearby branch warehouses 6, the main server 81 can also control inventory transfers so that toner cartridges can be delivered within the period desired by the user 4 or in the shortest possible period.

- Product information database

- Product name and model number

- Related consumables

- Product-specific inventory information

- Product-specific sales and collection period

- Price information

The product name and model number information indicates the product name and model number of the main unit. The related consumables refer to information stored/managed, being associated with the main unit which

uses the consumables. The product-specific sales and collection is information about the average period (time) from the time when each product containing consumables are sold (delivered to the user and started to be used) to the time when the consumables are collected. The average is calculated based on past data or the like. The price information is also associated with product names and model numbers as well as with related consumables. It indicates the prices for model numbers and related consumables.

● Customer information database

User ID and password

Name, address, telephone number, and facsimile number

E-mail address

Sales representative, salesman, and serviceman

Nearby branch warehouse #1

Nearby branch warehouse #2

Name (model number) and quantity of purchased product

Order history

Collection flag

Collection history

Payment history

Price information

The collection flag indicates whether the user wants to use collection service, which will be described later. It is set via a user interface shown in FIG. 6. If this

collection flag is set to "Use collection service," the collection service will be provided continuously for the consumables or the like purchased by the user. The present invention may provide a mechanism which will allow the user to set this flag for each order or each product. If the user can set the collection flag (whether to use collection service) for each order and each product, it is possible to implement a collection service which can accommodate users' wishes for collection more flexibly.

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- Shipment information database

- Customer information

- Status

- Order number

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- Order date/time

- Ordered item

- Delivery time

- Price

- Payment method

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- Shipment date/time

- Shipment arrival date/time

- Receiving inspection date/time

- Collection information database

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- Collection source customer information

- Collection number

- Collection date/time